As per the latest available information, the cumulative rainfall situation in the country as on 8.8.2006 has improved and the deficiency in the country as a whole as well as in north-west region has come down to 3% of LPA.

The crop area sown in kharif 2006 till 7.8.2006 under various crops in the Northern States is reported to be 164.3 lakh hectare as compared to the crop area of 163.4 lakh hectare sown during kharif 2005 till that date. In case of rice, the area sown in the Northern States was 82.3 lakh hectares during the kharif 2006 till 7.8.2006 as against 82.5 lakh hectares in kharif 2005 till that date.

(b) Government regularly reviews the crop weather situation in the country through weekly Crop Weather Watch Group Meetings held in the Ministry of Agriculture to take suitable action, as and when required.

Joint venture projects of Railways

*278. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Railways propose to enter into joint ventures with various States for different rail projects;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the details of such projects which are located in Orissa?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI LALU PRASAD): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Ministry of Railways had formed Joint Ventures in participation with State Governments for implementation of rail infrastructure projects in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat. Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd (RVNL) has further proposed implementation of certain port connectivity projects through Joint Ventures, where State Government is also one of the stake-holders.

(c) Haridaspur-Paradip New Line Project in Orissa costing Rs. 594 crores has been proposed by RVNL for implementation in participation with Government of Orissa and other strategic partners.